United States Postal Service® Link Programs

Frequently Asked Questions

NCOALink®   **ANK**Link®

LACSLink®   **Suite**Link®

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Table of Questions

NCOA$^{Link®}$ FAQs

Question: What is NCOA^{Link}?

Answer: NCOA^{Link} is a secure dataset product of approximately 160 million permanent changes-of-address from the United States Postal Service® (USPS®) that enables mailers to update name and address mailing lists with new addresses from individuals, families and businesses that have moved and filed change-of-address orders with the USPS.

Question: Are there different levels of NCOA^{Link}?

Answer: There are six (6) licensing categories:

A _Full Service Provider (FSP)_ uses NCOA^{Link} to perform Move Update processing for mailing lists, 51% of which **must** be owned by unrelated third parties. They receive 48 months of change-of-address (COA) information, updated weekly. Each Full Service Provider pays the USPS an annual license fee of $190,000.

A _Limited Service Provider (LSP)_ uses NCOA^{Link} to perform Move Update processing for mailing lists; however, there is no minimum amount that must be from third parties. They receive 18 months of change-of-address information, updated weekly. LSPs may also use an additional change-of-address product, ANK^{Link}, which is an add-on product to NCOA^{Link} that provides additional move information for "possible moves" in months 19 – 48. Each LSP pays the USPS an annual license fee of $16,500.

An _End-User_ (EU) uses NCOA^{Link} to perform Move Update processing strictly for their own mailing lists, and may **not** process mailing lists for third parties. They receive 18 months of change-of-address information, updated monthly. EUs may also use an additional change-of-address product, ANK^{Link}, which is an add-on product to NCOA^{Link} that provides additional move information for "possible moves" in months 19 – 48. Each End-User Mailer pays the USPS an annual license fee of $8,300.

An Interface Developer licenses the right to develop an NCOA^{Link} interface for internal purposes and third parties. A company wishing to develop a software interface pays an initial license fee of $5,600 and an annual license fee of $1,100.

An Interface Distributor licenses the right to distribute the NCOA^{Link} interface that it developed. Distributors pay an annual license fee of $27,750.

A NCOA^{Link} MPE Solution license allows the use of NCOA^{Link} data on multiline optical character readers (MLOCR) to update and spray change-of-address information on mailpieces prior to submission to the USPS. The NCOALink MPE solution, which is similar to the _FASTforward_® system, can be used on delivery point barcode sorters to identify, sort, and remove undeliverable-as-addressed (UAA) mail prior to submission to the USPS. All MPE data users pay an annual license fee of $8,300.

Question: How do I become an NCOA^{Link} licensee?

Answer: You must apply, and get certified by the USPS before you can license and use NCOA^{Link}.

Question: Can you describe the certification process for NCOA^{Link}?

Answer: There are four separate steps involved in becoming a certified NCOA^{Link} licensee:

Step 1 - "Application and Self-Certification Statement Approval" - To achieve the first level of certification from the USPS, you must fill out and submit the following information/forms:

- Application
- Confidentiality Statement
- Self-Certification Statements
    1. Narrative describing your company and the nature of your business.
    2. Description of how you plan to use the NCOA^{Link} technology.
    3. The estimated number of records you will process and the update cycle you will follow. Also, the estimated number and frequency of mailings including number of pieces per mailing. *(End Users only.)*
    4. Facility name and address of each Postal facility where mailings are deposited. Identify USPS National Account Manager or other Business Service Network representative, if applicable. *(End Users only.)*
- Key Personnel List
- PS Form 1357-W (Web Access Request Form)
- Security Documentation

The Postal Service will review your paperwork, and decide whether or not you have "passed" Step 1 certification. Upon passing, you will receive an authorization code from the USPS.

Step 2 – "Software Acquisition" - The authorization code you received from the USPS in Step 1 must then be provided to your software vendor of choice before you can receive the actual certified NCOA^{Link} interface from your vendor.

Step 3 – "NCOA^{Link} Testing & Certification" – Now that you have received, installed and tested your certified interface, it's time to move on to the third step. To begin, you must submit to the USPS a written request and a completed Software Product Information Form requesting that the USPS perform an electronic NCOA^{Link} certification test. The Postal Service will then notify you when they have a test file available for you. The first time you download and run this file is called a "Stage 1" test. You will submit your answers to the USPS, who will then grade your test file and work with you on whatever issues you may have. When you have completed the Stage 1 test, you will be sent a different test file to use in your "Stage 2" testing. The Stage 2 test is what will ultimately determine if you pass NCOA^{Link} certification.

Step 4 – "Execution of License Agreement" – Upon passing your Stage 2 test for certification, the Postal Service will send you a certification notice, a prorated fee chart and a standard NCOA^{Link} license agreement. The license agreement must be signed and returned with payment of the license fee. After the USPS approves and counter-signs the license agreement, they will send a fully executed copy of it to you along with a set of DVD-ROMs containing the live NCOA^{Link} datasets.

Question: What kind of security information will I have to provide during my certification process?

Answer: As part the Step 1 certification process, the Postal Service requires you to submit written information providing the following:
- Descriptions about the specific measures you have taken to secure the physical and electronic environments in which the NCOA^{Link} system will reside. (If the USPS feels that your descriptions are not clear and/or complete, you may be required to provide a diagram.)

- The names and addresses of all parent, subsidiary and/or affiliate companies or entities, together with the following for each: (a) state of incorporation or registration, and (b) principal place of business. *(Service Providers only.)*
- A list of company names for any and all parent, subsidiary and/or affiliate companies. *(End Users only.)*
- A list of all internal files/lists/databases and those of related entities, which will be processed through licensee applicant's NCOA^Link system. (You must also identify any relational databases in the list.)

Question: Where can I find all these forms and information?

Answer: On the Postal Service website: www.ribbs.usps.gov. Select "Site Index A – Z" and then "NCOA^Link".

Question: When do I have to pay the Postal Service for my license?

Answer: As part of Step 4 during your certification process, you must submit payment of your license fee along with the signed license agreement to the USPS before they will send you the live NCOA^Link datasets.

Question: Is the fee prorated or the same for every licensee regardless of when they receive certification?

Answer: The license fee will be prorated according to what month of the year you submit your signed license agreement. During Step 4 of your certification process, the USPS will send you a copy of the standard NCOA^Link license agreement, which includes a prorated fee chart.

Question: If I am only going to process my own mailing lists, but I want to get weekly database updates; can I get licensed as a Limited Service Provider?

Answer: Yes. As an LSP there is no requirement on how much of your NCOA^Link processing is done for unrelated third parties.

Question: Can I switch from being an End User Mailer to a Limited or Full Service Provider?

Answer: Yes. However, you will have to go through the certification process again as it is different for a Service Provider than an End User Mailer. Contact the United States Postal Service in Memphis, TN to notify them of your desire to switch.

Question: Who do I contact in Memphis?

Answer: You can contact the NCOA^Link Certification Department by calling 1-800-589-5766.

Question: What reports will the USPS require me to produce?

Answer: The Postal Service requires various different reports depending on which type of licensee you are, and these reports also have different schedules for when you need to produce and submit them. Please refer to the following table for type, frequency, etc.

REPORT	FSP	LSP	EUM	PROVIDE TO	RETENTION PERIOD	FREQUENCY	FORMAT
Processing Acknowledgment Form (PAF)	√	√		Customer	6 years	With each new customer and once annually thereafter.	Hardcopy and electronic.
Required Text Document	√	√		Customer		With each new customer and once annually thereafter.	Hardcopy
Processing Summary	√	√	√	Customer USPS (by request)		Every job	Hardcopy
Performance Reports							
(Customer) Service Log	√	√	√	USPS	5 years	Monthly	Electronic
PAF Customer Information Log	√	√		USPS	5 years	Monthly	Electronic
Broker/Agent/List Administrator Log	√	√		USPS	5 years	Monthly	Electronic

FSP = Full Service Provider   LSP = Limited Service Provider   EUM = End User Mailer

Question: What is a Processing Acknowledgment Form?

Answer: The Processing Acknowledgment Form, or "PAF", is a Postal Service form that must be provided by a Service Provider to their customer, along with the Required Text Document, before beginning any NCOA^Link processing for them. The PAF must then be completed, signed and returned to the Service Provider by the customer. This must happen before any work is done and then once annually thereafter. Service Providers must keep a copy of each signed PAF for a period of 6 years.

Question: Where can I find more information about all these reports?

Answer: On the Postal Service website: www.ribbs.usps.gov. Select "Site Index A – Z" and then "NCOA^Link". Select "NCOA^Link Page", then select the link representing the desired information.) In each licensee section, there is a document titled "Licensee Performance Requirements" that details all the reports and requirements.

Question: Does the Postal Service review my NCOA^Link processing?

Answer: Yes, in two different ways. The first is through the monthly reports you must submit to them. These are explained above. The second is through periodic electronic testing. At times of their choosing, the Postal Service will notify you that they have an electronic test file for you to download and process. Once you have completed the test, you must send the file and reports back to the Postal Service to be graded. This testing is similar to the Stage 2 testing during the certification process, and will occur on an annual basis.

Question: What are "NCOA^{Link} Return Codes"?

Answer: "NCOA^{Link} Return Codes" is the Postal Service new name for what used to be called "nixies." These are informational codes returned from the NCOA^{Link} matching process that describe why a record did or did not match. These return codes are available to all levels of NCOA^{Link} licensee.

Question: Can you give me some examples of the NCOA^{Link} Return Codes?

Answer: The following table describes some of the NCOA^{Link} Return Codes and what they mean.

CODE	DESCRIPTION	ADDRESS	HOW
A	**COA Match** – The input record matched to a business, individual or family type master file record. A new address could be furnished.	Y	D
00	**No Match** – The input record COULD NOT BE matched to a master file record. A new address could not be furnished.	N	D
01	**Found COA: Foreign Move** – The input record matched to a business, individual or family type master file record, but the new address was outside the USPS delivery area.	N	D
02	**Found COA: Moved Left No Address (MLNA) –** The input record matched to a business, individual or family type master file record, and the new address was not provided to USPS.	N	D
07	**Cannot Match COA: Conflicting Directions: Gender Related –** There is more than one COA (individual or family type) record for the match algorithm and the genders of the names on the COAs are different. Therefore, a single match result could not be determined.	N	D
12	**Cannot Match COA: Middle Name Test Failed –** The input record matched to an individual or family record on the master file with the same address and surname. However, a match cannot be made because the input name contains a conflict with the middle name or initials on the master file record.	N	D
19	**Found COA: New Address Not ZIP + 4 Coded –** There is a change of address on file, but the new address cannot be ZIP + 4 coded and therefore there is no 11-digit DPBC to store or return.	N	D
66	**Daily Delete –** The input record matched to a business, individual or family type master file record with an old address that is present in the Daily Delete file. The presence of an address in the Daily Delete file means that a COA with this is address is pending deletion from the master file and that <u>no</u> mail may be forwarded from this address.	N	S
92	**COA Match: Secondary Number Dropped From Input Address –** The input record matched to a master file record, but the input address had a secondary number and the master file record did not. The match is a ZIP + 4 street level match.	Y	S

Address = "Y" = New Address Provided   How = "D" = derived by data – returned in lieu of 11-digit
      "N" = New Address Not Provided   "S" = derived by software

Question: How do I receive the updates for the COA database? Can I download them off the Internet?

Answer: The live NCOA^{Link} datasets are delivered on DVD-ROMs only, Monthly updates containing the 18-month NCOALink Product datasets will be provided via DVD to Licensees, and are not available via Internet download or other physical media.

Question: Do I have to apply the updates when I receive them?

Answer: Yes. Licensees must install the current monthly NCOALink database no later than five (5) business days after receipt.

Question: What are the "daily deletes" and how do I apply them?

Answer: The Daily Delete file contains addresses that are pending deletion from the NCOA[Link] database, and no mail may be forwarded from these addresses. Service Providers must incorporate this file into their daily processing by downloading it from the USPS RIBBS website. It is optional for End User-Mailers.

Question: Can I run internal test files after certification even if I do not apply the changes?

Answer: Yes. The Postal Service recognizes the need for licensees to test, and has established processing codes that indicate to them what kind of testing you do and when you do it. These tests are included in the monthly reports you submit to the USPS. For example, here is a table defining the different testing categories established for Full Service Providers of NCOA[Link]. Be sure to reference the License Performance Requirements document specific to your desired licensee level.

CODE	DESCRIPTION	DISPOSITION OF RESULTS	F	L	E
EMP TRAIN	File processed as part of employee training.	Results discarded; no updates performed or information released.	√	√	√
INT DB TEST	Testing involving proprietary Licensee database.	No updates performed; results discarded after analysis.	√	√	√
MKTG TEST	Testing involving external customer lists.	Return information consists of statistics only; COA data is discarded, not returned to customer.	√	√	
NORMAL	Process mailing list for update prior to mailing.	COA information provided to mailer and/or mailer's representative.	√	√	√
STAGE I	Test of matching performance against USPS self-test file.	Results used for internal program analysis and subsequently discarded.	√	√	√
STAGE II	Test of matching performance scored by USPS.	Output transmitted to USPS for evaluation and discarded when test results finalized.	√	√	√
SYS TEST	File processed as part of system testing such as loading of USPS file updates.	Results discarded; no updates performed or information released.	√	√	√

F = Full Service Provider   L = Limited Service Provider   E = End-User Mailer

Question: Can I apply to become an End-User Mailer if I process files for a wholly owned subsidiary?

Answer: No. An End-User Mailer may only process files that *they* own, and may not provide service to anyone, including wholly- or partially-owned subsidiaries, affiliates or parent companies.

LACS^{Link}™ FAQs

Question: What is LACS?

Answer: The Locatable Address Conversion System (LACS) program was originally created almost 20 years ago when the USPS recognized the value of offering conversion information for addresses that had been changed by local governments or municipalities primarily due to the implementation of a **"911"** emergency response system. The change is generally from rural-route-and-box-number addresses to city-style addresses with street names and house numbers, although some existing city-style addresses may be renamed or renumbered too.

Question: What is LACS^{Link}?

Answer: LACS^{Link} is a program available from the USPS to replace the original LACS program. Similar to NCOA^{Link} and DPV, the Postal Service has converted the LACS database into their encrypted storage technology for LACS^{Link}, and wishes to make it available to a wider audience.

Question: Can you give me some examples of the different LACS^{Link} address conversions?

Answer:

Rural Box Addressing	Street-Style Addressing	PO Box Renumbering
Old Address RR 1 Box 127A New Address 17255 Scenic Rd	Old Address 905 France Ave New Address 1125 Freedom Ave	Old Address PO Box 123 New Address PO Box 555123

Question: What are the USPS requirements for LACS^{Link}?

Answer: CASS^{TM} and NCOA^{Link} software developers were *required* to integrate LACS^{Link} into their products as of the CASS certification period beginning September 1, 2005. This means that the developer's software interface must not only be able to return a code from the USPS ZIP + 4® file indicating an address can be converted, but also provide the option to convert the address.

Beginning August 1, 2007, all users of CASS Certified™ software must use LACS^{Link} in their address correction and standardization processing in order to generate a PS-3553 form, and then mail at automation presort postage rates.

Question: What benefits can I gain from running LACS^{Link}?

Answer: By taking advantage of the LACS^{Link} functionality, you will have the most current and accurate addresses from the USPS. This will not only improve the overall deliverability of your mail, but it could speed up delivery as well. In addition, it can help eliminate duplicates if the customer has already provided a change to the mailers, and it can keep you from introducing data entry errors when manually keying address changes into your database.

ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ FAQs

Question: What is ANK$^{\text{Link}}$?

Answer: ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ is an enhancement to the existing 18-month NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ product that Limited Service Providers and End User Mailers employ. The 18-month NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ database provides change-of-address information for moves that occurred during the past 18 months, including the new address of the recipient. ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ will enable NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ Limited Service Providers and End User Mailers to optionally acquire an additional 30 months of change-of-address information.

Question: Does ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ return the new address?

Answer: No. ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ *will not* return the actual new address. ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ will, however, provide users a return code indicating a probable move occurred in months 19-48, along with the move-effective date.

Question: How does ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ help me?

Answer: ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ allows you to make more informed decisions regarding a specific customer or prospect that you wish to mail to. If the ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ return code data indicates the intended recipient has moved you may choose to either remove the individual from the mailing or attempt to determine the actual new address by seeking the services of an NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ Full Service Provider.

Question: What are the USPS certification requirements for ANK$^{\text{Link}}$?

Answer: ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ was created as an enhancement to the existing NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ product, and as such its development, distribution and use are all covered under existing NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ licenses. ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ certification is covered under the testing and certification procedures for Developers and Distributors of NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$.

Question: How do I acquire ANK$^{\text{Link}}$?

Answer: Limited Service Provider and End User Mailer licensees who wish to obtain the ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ product need to visit the USPS website, www.ribbs.usps.gov, and download the "ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ REQUESTFORM.DOC" from either the "NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ Limited Service Provider Documents" or "NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ End User Documents" page of the ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ section. Once they complete and submit this form to the USPS, they must then contact their NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ Distributor to purchase and license the ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ functionality within their NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ interface. The USPS will send the Limited Service Provider or End User Mailer an invoice for the ANK$^{\text{Link}}$ fee.

Question: What are the USPS fees for ANK$^{\text{Link}}$?

Answer: Limited Service Providers will pay $3,900 per year, and End User Mailers will pay $850 per year. These fees are in addition to the normal NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ fees.

Question: If I only own a CASS Certified™ software interface, can I still use ANK$^{\text{Link}}$?

Answer: No. Only licensees and users of a certified software interface for NCOA$^{\text{Link}}$ can take advantage of ANK$^{\text{Link}}$.

Suite^{Link}™ FAQs

Question: What is Suite^{Link}?

Answer: Suite^{Link} is a USPS address-quality initiative that will provides mailers a tool to correct or append suite information for business addresses on their lists.

Question: Will Suite^{Link} return an actual company name?

Answer: No. Suite^{Link} will only return suite information for address-matches that already have a company name on the input record.

Question: How much will it cost to license Suite^{Link}?

Answer: Other than the cost of purchasing the system from a certified CASS vendor, there is no additional USPS license fee to use Suite^{Link}.